The Brooks Food Center team, Wilfred, Dan, and Tom, along with Wilfred's daughter Sally, ca. 1953.

Pat Murphy (left) and Russell Forsyth (right) were loyal employees at Broods Food Center in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Dan Brooks, Wilfred Brooks, and Tom Brooks at the 1967 grand opening of their new IGA Foodliner market in Petersburg.

Brooks Food Center at 412 W. Michigan Avenue as it looked in 1961. The coin laundry next door, 406 W. Michigan Avenue, was the site of the grocery from 1936 to 1948.

Through the years, Brooks Food Center was well served by several long-time employees, including Wally and Richard Shingledecker, Pat Murphy, Russell Forsyth, and Ken Mericle. Wilfred credits Murphy with teaching him how to cut meat. Forsyth was a member of the Ypsilanti Fire Department - later chief - and he was often called away from his duties at the market to fulfill his fire-fighting responsibilities. Mericle was known for his jaunty waxed moustache and his extensive collection of Kaiser-Fraser cars.

The business continued to thrive, so in 1967 the brothers opened a second store under the IGA banner in Petersburg. This was a major expansion, and it required a significant effort by the whole family. Wilfred and Sylvia made a special effort to become involved in that community as well as Ypsilanti. Sylvia helped out in many ways, including paying bills and doing payroll, although the formal accounting was still done by A. B. Curtis and Co. In 1982, total sales at the Ypsilanti store reached $1.32 million; Petersburg sales added another $1.15 million.

Robbers and thieves were a recurring threat to the Ypsilanti business. At one point, intruders climbed onto the roof at night, cut a hole, and lowered themselves into the store to help themselves. Like his father, Tom could be a bit short tempered, and he was especially irritated by shoplifters. Once, he chased a miscreant out the front door of the store and down the street, finally tossing a meat cleaver at him. In 1978, tragedy struck when gun-toting robbers entered the Ypsilanti store, demanding money. While Wilfred worked to open the safe, Tom sought to leave the store in disgust, and the nervous gunmen killed him.

Dan Brooks died in 1973 and his wife, Lottie, followed in 1986. Both Wilfred's wife, Sylvia, and Tom's wife, Dorothy, died in 2000. After Tom's death, it became increasingly difficult for Wilfred to run the business in two cities without a full working partner. Finally, in 1985, the markets in both Ypsilanti and Petersburg were sold and the corporation was dissolved. The Ypsilanti store, initially sold to Jin Moon, became a Korean market; today, it is operated as Dos Hermanos, a Mexican market.

For more than 80 years, the Brooks family served the Ypsilanti community through the food business, building a reputation for high quality products and customer service. One of the last major food-oriented family enterprises in town, the Brooks market made a lasting impression on the community and set a high standard for today's food emporiums. ■